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Hijrah According to the Islamic State: An Analysis of Dabiq

Matan Uberman and Dr. Shaul Shay

In the Islamic tradition, Hijrah refers to Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE. However, the Islamic State (IS) has manipulated the same concept to attract Muslim followers to its territories in Syria and Iraq. The article analyses IS' propaganda magazine, Dabiq, to explore how IS has created a false understanding of Hijrah and exploited the concept for its own political and military agenda.

Introduction

Since the inception of the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) in June 2014, IS started manipulating the concept of *Hijrah* (Islamic migration). While none of the existing prominent Jihadi-Salafi scholars such as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and Abu Qatada al-Filistini – who support military means to establish an Islamic State – addressed the concept of *Hijrah* in detail, IS has managed to use its online propaganda magazine, *Dabiq,* to convey its formal viewpoint on the subject to potential recruits.

The concept of *Hijrah*, which represents Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE, is of great importance in Islam. The Prophet migrated to Medina because Muslims faced persecution in Mecca and found it difficult to practice their religion. Consequently, in the mainstream Islamic discourse, *Hijrah* constitutes moving from *Dar al-Harb* to *Dar al-Islam*. *Dar al-Harb*, which literally means "house of war," refers to lands where Islamic law is not implemented or where Muslims do not enjoy the freedom to practice their religion. Conversely, *Dar al-Islam*, which literally means "house of Islam," refers to areas under the rule of Islam. The traditional meaning of *Hijrah*, therefore, is that only Muslims who are unable to practise Islam, or face opposition when they do so, are obligated to migrate to the lands of the Muslims (Ebstein 2006).

IS, however, has exploited the concept of *Hijrah* to attract foreign fighters. In a detailed examination of all published issues of *Dabiq*, this article seeks to unravel aspects of *Hijrah* introduced by IS. It argues that while IS advocates the traditional *Hijrah* from *Dar al-Harb* to *Dar al-Islam*, the group has interpreted the application of the concept more broadly in order to widen its support base and areas of conflict.

From *Dar al-Harb* to *Dar al-Islam*: A Traditional Account

Traditionally, *Hijrah* meant migration from *Dar al-Harb* to *Dar al-Islam*. The concept is considered to have been coined by Abu Hanifa (699 – 767 AD), founder of the Sunni Hanafi School of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). According to him, there are a number of requirements for a country to be part of *Dar al-Islam*. First, Muslims must be able to enjoy peace and security within the country. Second, the country should be ruled by Muslim rulers. Third, it has common frontiers with some Muslim countries (Islamway.net 2002). Conversely, *Dar al-Harb* refers to territory under the control of non-believers who are belligerent towards the house of Islam and presumably hostile to the Muslims living in its dominion (Zahid 2016).

According to the Shafi'i scholar al-Mawardi, after the conquest of Mecca by Muhammad and his companions, *Hijrah* became an obligation only on those Muslims who are unable to practise their religion. This perception holds that in the time of the Prophet, the execution of religious commandments and duties was the primary objective of *Hijrah*. The believers were asked to migrate to Medina so that they would avoid the persecutions of the people of Mecca, and the temptation to recant Islam as a result of it. They migrated in order to learn the laws of Islam from the Prophet himself (Mawardi 1994). Until today, only when it is not possible for a Muslim to practise Islam will they be obligated to emigrate from *Dar al-Harb*.

Hijrah from "*Dar al-Islam*" to the Islamic State

Hijrah to *Dar al-Islam* is an obligation only for those Muslims who reside in *Dar al-Harb*, viz. places where they cannot practise their religion. IS, on the other hand, propagates that there is persecution of "true believers" all over the world, including Muslim countries that constitute the traditional *Dar al-Islam*. IS, thus, calls for *Hijrah* even from the traditional "*Dar al-Islam*" to a new Islamic safe haven in Iraq and Syria – the Islamic State. By creating this delusion, IS has created a new sense of modern *Hijrah*.

It is imperative to understand how IS innovated the concept of *Hijrah* to serve its purpose and justified it through its propaganda magazine *Dabiq*. Firstly, in *Dabiq,* IS asserts what and where the true *Dar al-Islam* is today and does

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not consider any other entity as the true *Dar al-Islam* except the territories it controlled.

In Issue 2, it is written: "Many readers are probably asking about their obligations towards the *Khilafah*... The first priority is to perform *Hijrah* from wherever you are to the Islamic State, from dārul-kufr to dārul-Islām. Rush to the shade of the Islamic State with your parents, siblings, spouses, and children" (*Dabiq* 2014a, 3).

Secondly, the authors show their contempt towards secular and religious Arab Muslim countries. IS has sanctioned these places and governments as non-*Dar al-Islam*. In Issue 11, it is written: "with the revival of Islam's state, *Hijrah* is to the wilāyāt of the Khilāfah, not to Nusayrī, Rāfidī, Sahwah, or PKK territory, nor to America, Europe, and their tāghūt allies (most Arab and Muslim states especially secular states). Ibnul-Qayyim said that 'if the laws of Islam are not implemented somewhere, it is not Dārul-Islām'" (*Dabiq* 2015a, 22). This position is demonstrated through a remark made in an interview with a Tunisian IS fighter in Issue 8: "I decided to perform *Hijrah* to Shām because most of the brothers I used to work with were either killed or imprisoned and all the roads for me to continue jihād in Tunisia were cut off. Alhamdulillāh, by performing *Hijrah* to Shām, I was blessed with witnessing the revival of the Khilāfah" (*Dabiq* 2015b, 61). The aim of this remark is to suggest that Tunisia is not a true *Dar al-Islam* and that "*jihadists*" in Tunisia (and others from traditional *Dar al-Islam*) should migrate to the Islamic State.

Thirdly, *Dabiq*'s team hopes to communicate to potential recruits from traditional *Dar al-Islam* to migrate by giving the example of their countrymen already migrating to the Islamic

State and fighting. As such, they want to inspire others who intend to travel to Syria but have not yet done so. In Issue 3, it is written: "if you were to go to the frontlines of ar-Raqqah, al-Barakah, etc., you would find the soldiers and the commanders to be of different lands: the Jordanian, the Tunisian, the Egyptian, the Somali, the Turk, the Albanian, the Chechen, the Indonesian and so on" (*Dabiq* 2014b, 5-6).

Another important innovation is that IS has not mentioned Syria and Iraq as the only places for *Hijrah*. IS considers its *wilayats* (governorates) as extensions of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq and thus calls for *Hijrah* of Muslims to these locations as well. In Issue 8, it affirms: "The Islamic State expanded from Iraq into Shām and thereafter to other lands: West Africa, Algeria, Libya, Khurāsān, Sinai, Yemen, and the Arabian Peninsula" (*Dabiq* 2015c, 5). *Dabiq*'s team mentions that these *wilayats* enable potential fighters from traditional *Dar al-Islam* to make *Hijrah* even if they are unable to reach Syria or Iraq. In this sense, *Dabiq* specifically refers to Libya and formally validates it for *Hijrah*. Again, in Issue 8, it says: "Libya has become an ideal land of *Hijrah* for those who find difficulty making their way to Shām, particularly those of our brothers and sisters in Africa" (*Dabiq* 2015d, 26). IS also released a video on 22 June 2016 in an attempt to recruit radical fighters in the Philippines and neighbouring countries; it, however, stated clearly that "If you can't get to Syria, join the *muhajideen* in the Philippines" (The Philippine Star 2016).

IS has, therefore, manipulated the call for *Hijrah* from traditional *Dar al-Islam* to the Islamic State, including all its *wilayats*, which IS perceives as the only true *Dar al-Islam* today.

Hijrah from *Dar al-Harb* to the Islamic State

IS has even manipulated the traditional understanding of *Hijrah* and made it relevant to its potential recruits. *Dabiq* uses different tools to justify *Hijrah* and attract Muslims from the countries IS perceives as *Dar al-Harb* (mainly the West) to the Islamic State. It is important to note IS' manipulation of the term *Dar al-Harb* when in reality, most non-Muslim countries (amongst them Western countries) guarantee religious freedom, both in theory and practice.

First, the motif of the "stranger" or "outsider" is used by *Dabiq* to identify with Muslims who see themselves as "strangers" in their home or host

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country. In fact, by their clever use of technology and social media, IS plants the same notion even in those who do not see themselves as strangers or outsiders and motivate them to emigrate. According to Issue 3, Ibnul-Qayyim said, "When Islam first began to emerge, it was something strange, and anyone who embraced it and responded to Allah and His Messenger became a stranger in his district, his tribe, his family, and his clan. Thus, those who responded to the da'wah of Islam left their tribes. They were lone individuals who emigrated from their tribes and clans, and entered into Islam. Therefore, they were the strangers, in reality, until Islam had emerged, its da'wah had spread, and the people entered into it in multitudes, such that they were no longer strangers" (*Dabiq* 2014c, 8).

Dabiq also attempts to attract European Muslims to carry out *Hijrah* by arousing feelings of resentment and even hatred towards their home country by appealing to their inferior economic status. This is done in tandem with the feelings of disrespect and indignity that some European Muslims feel (*Dabiq* 2014d). In Issue 3, the Islamic State entices such people with this statement: "Do not worry about money or accommodations for yourself and your family. There are plenty of homes and resources to cover you and your family" (*Dabiq* 2014e, 33).

Potential Security Threat of "Reverse Migration" and "No Migration"

Reverse migration, commonly seen as a trend which will bring about 'returning fighters,' refers to fighters who are ordained by IS to migrate from the Islamic State to *Dar al-Islam* and *Dar al-*

Harb. In Issue 3 of *Dabiq*, IS calls this as an act of "authorised" jihad: "As for one who travels to a land outside of Shām for jihād on the order of the amīr, his journey is an act of obedience which does not nullify his *Hijrah* to Shām or his residence within it. This is the case even if he is killed outside of Shām" (*Dabiq* 2014f, 11). A recent study found that 30% of foreign fighters have returned to their home countries, presenting potential security threats (Ginkel and Entenmann 2016). This is because many have returned to carry out the instructions of the Islamic State's leadership and spread terror. For example, in the 2016 Brussels bombings, three of the attackers were returned fighters; the November 2015 Paris attacks were also planned by the returnee Abdelhamid Abaaoud. Muslim countries are also targeted, e.g. the 2016 Jakarta attacks planned by Bahrun Naim and the April 2015 Kuala Lumpur terror plot where two of the suspects fought in Syria with IS.

At the same time, IS has obliged those who cannot do *Hijrah* to execute attacks in their home countries. For instance, in Issue 11 of *Dabiq,* IS asserted that: "As for the Muslim who is unable to perform *Hijrah* from dārul-kufr to the Khilāfah, then there is much opportunity for him to strike out against the kāfir enemies of the Islamic State" (*Dabiq* 2015e, 54). Thereafter, many targets are listed, including Michigan, Los Angeles, New York, Jakarta, Riyadh and so on. In his speech on 14 May 2015, the so-called caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi added that "the Muslim who cannot make *Hijrah* should not hesitate nor consult any supposed 'scholar' on this obligation. He should attack after declaring his *bay'ah* (pledge of allegiance) to the Khilāfah, so as not to die a death of Jāhiliyyah" (*Dabiq* 2015f, 54). As such, it is also important to check IS sympathisers and supporters outside of Iraq and Syria since they have already received instructions to conduct attacks.

The Future of *Hijrah*

The future of *Hijrah* depends on two alternative scenarios. First, if IS stays in power in Iraq and Syria, *Hijrah* will continue its natural course and the number of people joining IS will continue to rise. Second, if the world powers eliminate IS in Syria and Iraq, then Libya, Sinai Peninsula, Nigeria, and other emerging and potential future *wilayats* like the Philippines will likely be potential *Hijrah* destinations albeit on a much smaller scale. Therefore, even if the US-led coalition and Russia defeat IS in Iraq and Syria, the problem

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will persist. Essentially, the transfer of people from Syria or Iraq to Libya or other *wilayats* will become the new definition of Islamic migration according to IS. This raises the possibility of such *wilayats* providing sanctuaries for plotting and carrying out terrorist attacks to adjacent territories. These *wilayats* are not meant to be static but expanding with the increase in followers or as government control recedes. The security problems posed by *Hijrah*, whether internal migration or external, must be dealt with before it becomes a bigger problem like Iraq and Syria.

Matan Uberman *is an Academic Researcher & an Information Specialist at The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center (ITIC), Tel Aviv and The Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy at the IDC Herzliya, Israel.*

Dr. Col. (Res.) Shaul Shay *is the Director of Research of The Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS) and a Research Fellow at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT). Dr. Shay is one of the leading experts of Middle Eastern Studies, local and international terrorism and Military History. Dr. Shay is the author and the editor of 17 books, 9 of them were published in the USA and the U.K.*

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